NUMB. CCCLXX.

The SPECTATOR.

Turpe eſt difficiles habere nugas,
Et ſtultus eſt labor ineptiarum. Mart.

Friday, Auguſt 29. 1712.

I Have been very often diſappointed of late Years, when upon examining the new Edition of a Claſſick Author, I have found above half the Volume taken up with Various Readings. When I have expected to find a Learned Note upon a doubtful Paſſage in a *Latin* Poet, I have only been informed, that ſuch or ſuch Ancient Manuſcripts for an *et* write an *ac*, or of ſome other notable Diſcovery of the like Importance. Indeed, when a different Reading gives us a different Senſe, or a new Elegance in an Author, the Editor does very well in taking Notice of it; but when he only entertains us with the ſeveral ways of Spelling the ſame Word, and gathers together the various Blunders and Miſtakes of twenty or thirty different Tranſcribers, they only take up the Time of the learned Reader, and puzzle the Minds of the Ignorant. I have often fancied with myſelf how enraged an old *Latin* Author would be, ſhould he ſee the ſeveral Abſurdities in Senſe and Grammar, which are imputed to him by ſome or other of theſe Various Readings. In one he ſpeaks Nonſenſe; in another makes uſe of a Word that was never heard of: In ſhort, there is ſcarce a Soleciſm in Writing which the beſt Author is not guilty of, if we may be at Liberty to read him in the Words of ſome Manuſcript, which the laborious Editor has thought fit to examine in the Proſecution of his Work.

I queſtion not but ſeveral Ladies and pretty Fellows will be very curious to underſtand what it is that I have been hitherto talking of, I ſhall therefore give them a Notion of this Practice, by endeavouring to write after the manner of ſeveral Perſons who make an eminent Figure in the Republick of Letters. To this end we will ſuppoſe, that the following Song, which by the way is a beautiful Deſcant upon a ſingle Thought, like the Compoſitions of the beſt Ancient Lyrick Poets, I ſay we will ſuppoſe this Song is an old Ode which I preſent to the Publick in a new Edition, with the ſeveral Various Readings which I find of it in former Editions, and in Ancient Manuſcripts. Thoſe who cannot reliſh the various Readings, will however find their Account in the Song, which never before appeared in Print.

My Love was fickle once and changing,
Nor e'er would ſettle in my Heart;
From Beauty ſtill to Beauty ranging,
In ev'ry Face I found a Dart.

'Twas firſt a Charming Shape enſlav'd me;
An Eye then gave the fatal Stroke:
'Till by her Wit Corinna *ſav'd me,*
And all my former Fetters broke.

But now a long and laſting Anguiſh
For Belvidera *I endure;*
Hourly I Sigh and hourly Languiſh,
Nor hope to find the wonted Cure.

Fa-

For here the falſe unconſtant Lover,
After a thouſand Beauties ſhown;
Does new ſurpriſing Charms diſcover,
And finds Variety in One.

Various Readings.

Stanza the Firſt, Verſe the Firſt, *And changing.*] The *and* in ſome Manuſcripts is written thus, &, but that in the *Cotton* Library writes it in three diſtinct Letters.

Verſe the Second. *Nor e'er would.*] *Aldus* reads it *ever would*; but as this would hurt the Metre, we have reſtored it to its genuine Reading, by obſerving that *Synæreſis* which had been neglected by ignorant Tranſcribers.

Ibid. *In my Heart.*] *Scaliger*, and others, *on my Heart.*

Verſe the Fourth. *I found a Dart.*] The *Vatican* Manuſcript for *I* reads *it*, but this muſt have been the Hallucination of the Tranſcriber, who probably miſtook the Daſh of the *I.* for a *T.*

Stanza the Second, Verſe the Second. *The fatal Stroke.*] *Scioppius*, *Salmaſius*, and many others, for *the* read *a*, but I have ſtuck to the uſual Reading.

Verſe the Third. *Till by her Wit.*] Some Manuſcripts have it *his Wit*, others *your*, others *their Wit.* But as I find *Corinna* to be the Name of a Woman in other Authors, I cannot doubt but it ſhould be *her.*

Stanza the Third, Verſe the Firſt. *A long and laſting Anguiſh.*] The *German* Manuſcript reads *a laſting Paſſion*, but the Rhyme will not admit it.

Verſe the Second. *For* Belvidera *I endure.*] Did not all the Manuſcripts reclaim, I ſhould change *Belvidera* into *Pelvidera*; *Pelvis* being uſed by ſeveral of the Ancient Comick Writers for a Looking-Glaſs, by which means the Etymology of the Word is very viſible, and *Pelvidera* will ſignifie a Lady who often looks in her Glaſs, as indeed ſhe had very good reaſon, if ſhe had all thoſe Beauties which our Poet here aſcribes to her.

Verſe the Third, *Hourly I ſigh and hourly languiſh.*] Some for the Word *hourly* read *dayly*, and others *nightly*; the laſt has great Authorities of its ſide.

Verſe the Fourth, *The wonted Cure.*] The Elder *Stevens* reads *wanted Cure.*

Stanza the Fourth, Verſe the Second. *After a thouſand Beauties.*] In ſeveral Copies we meet with a *Hundred Beauties*, by the uſual Errour of the Tranſcribers, who probably omitted a Cypher, and had not taſte enough to know, that the Word *Thouſand* was ten times a greater Compliment to the Poet's Miſtreſs than an *Hundred.*

Verſe the Fourth. *And finds Variety in one.*] Moſt of the Ancient Manuſcripts have it *in two.* Indeed ſo many of them concur in this laſt Reading, that I am very much in doubt whether it ought not to take place. There are but two Reaſons which incline me to the Reading, as I have Publiſhed it; Firſt becauſe the Rhime, and Secondly becauſe the Senſe is preſerv'd by it. It might likewiſe proceed from the Oſcitancy of Tranſcribers, who, to diſpatch their Work the ſooner, uſed to write all Numbers in Cypher, and ſeeing the Figure 1 followed by a little Daſh of the Pen, as is cuſtomary in old Manuſcripts, they perhaps miſtook the Daſh for a ſecond Figure, and by caſting up both together compoſed out of them the Figure 2. But this I ſhall leave to the Learned, without determining any thing in a matter of ſo great Uncertainty.

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Mr. Burges, Druggiſt, at the Blue Anchor in Fleetſtreet, has received a new Supply of Spa Water, freſh and good, and certified as ſuch by the Greffier of the Spa, and being taken up from the beſt Well there, can with the greater certainty recommend it. N. B. He ſells all ſorts of fine Teas from Holland, and Spaniſh Snuff by wholeſale or retale.

LONDON: Printed for *Sam. Buckley*, at the *Dolphin* in *Little-Britain*; and Sold by *A. Baldwin* in *Warwick-Lane*; where Advertiſements are taken in, as alſo by *Charles Lillie*, Perfumer, at the Corner of *Beauford-Buildings* in the *Strand.*